FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

ISSUE 58 DECEMBER 2005

Editor's Forum

by Ken Patterson

Greetings to our regular readers. A warm welcome to new Friends.

In every issue we like to bring you good news. Unfortunately, occasionally your Committee is faced with fighting our cause in the interests of the Country Park. The latest situation is highlighted by our Secretary in his article on "Whitchurch Hospital Development".

Our Committee is moving forward with new ideas, and improving the presentation of information for the general public as well as the Friends. Standing still is not an option.

Your news and views of interest to members would be appreciated.

My thanks to all contributors, and of course to the distributors of the Newsletter who do sterling work, come shower or shine.

With Christmas fast approaching, all of us on the Committee, and Robin too, join in wishing you all a Joyful and Peaceful Festive Season and New Year.

P.S. Contributions for the March Newsletter need to be received by 14th February 2006

T-SHIRTS Adults: **£10.00** Children's: **£8.50**

SWEATSHIRTS (Range of colours for sweats and polos). Adults: **£16.50** Children's: **£13.00**

POLOSHIRTS Adults: **£14.50** Children's: **£11.50**

Good quality. All with **FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM** logo. All profits go to Reserve projects.

Contact: **PAULINE LINCK** *029-2061 7012*

EDITOR'S FORUM	1	CARDIFF CONSERVATION GROUP	5
RESERVE NEWS	2	RED IN BEAK AND CLAW	6, 7
HOSPITAL DEVELOPMENT	3	FRIENDS / RSPB WALK	7
BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH	3	BIRD FEED AT FOREST FARM	8
CORYTON HOUSE	4	MEMBERSHIP	8
TALES OF THE RIVERBANK II	5	MEETINGS AND EVENTS	8

Reserve News

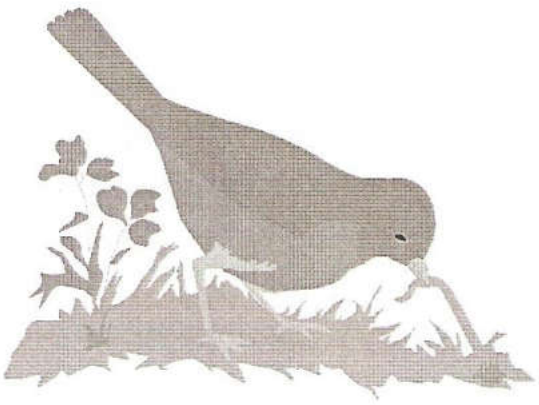
by Mike Wiley
Countryside Warden

One Saturday morning in mid-September I was at home, enjoying a day off, when I had a phone call from work. It was my colleague, **Paul Davies**, who rang to tell me that we had suffered a break-in the previous night. Paul informed me that the Land Rover (our only vehicle) and trailer were gone, and along with them a lot of our tools, including chain saws and brush cutters and everything else thought of value. This obviously was not the work of teenagers, but of a gang of criminals who, unluckily for us, were in the area at the time. Speaking to the police Crime Prevention Officer sometime later, he told me that this is the way some people live, solely on the proceeds of crimes like this. It is their work. I'm afraid I'm a bit naïve and, until you come up against something like this, you only think that it happens on TV. Well, a couple of months on, and we still haven't received any news from the police about the whereabouts of the Land Rover or any of our equipment, so I'm afraid that it looks as though we have seen the last of them.

The **Bird Hides** are still being trashed, but now they are not just bringing the odd can of beer with them; now it's **cases** of lager and **boxes** of candles. It seems that the best time to observe wildlife here is on a Saturday night inside the bird hides.

On a brighter note the **Nature Reserve**, or rather our stretch of the Glamorganshire Canal, featured on TV recently in a series called ***The Canals of Wales*** presented by **Iolo Williams**. It didn't really show that much of the canal, but I suppose it's all good publicity.

It's coming up to mid-November now and we're about to begin the winter bird feeding programme. **Ted Edwards**, your ex-chairman, has bought the seed in with the money kindly donated by the Friends. The weather up to now has been mild, although very wet. The weather forecasters are saying that we're in for a cold winter, so the birds will need all the help we can give them. I'm sure that most of you already put food out in your gardens during the cold winter months but if you don't, now is the time to start. If the forecasters are right, it could literally make the difference between life and death for some birds.





Whilst writing this article the local hunt has just come down the lane and passed our house, heading for the fields and mountain. It is certainly well attended with about forty riders, some in hunting pink, others in black, a large pack of fox hounds and the usual hunt followers in four-wheel drive vehicles, some of which had terriers inside. Later that morning, while out walking I could see the hounds working the bracken-covered hill opposite me. It's amazing—if you didn't know it was illegal, you would swear that they were fox hunting!

WHITCHURCH HOSPITAL DEVELOPMENT

This development has been fought over many years, and our past Chairman and Secretary spent many hours trying to protect the **Reserve** from this damaging development. The **Friends** have now discovered that the Hospital Trust has produced an amended plan, and this has passed to the Council in late September.

The main changes involve increasing the housing density in the hospital meadows adjacent to the Reserve from 125 to 208 houses—an increase of 66%. The original plan was for large detached houses with similar sized gardens; the change will result in three-storey town houses being built to achieve the required density. This will obviously have a greater environmental impact and cause even more damage to the Reserve than the original plans.

The Committee have produced a response to these proposals, objecting to the changes. However, based on previous planning decisions, and advice from Ted Edwards, we are far from confident that the Hospital Trust will not be successful.

The Friends are disappointed over the lack of communication from the planning department and have raised this issue together with proposed changes to the buffer zones in an attempt to provide some protection.

Individual friends can raise their objections to the **Planning Department** at **Cardiff City Hall**, quoting **Reference 05/2192**.

Martin Chamberlain

BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH

28th-29th January 2006

Whilst the Reserve provides us with the opportunity to see many species of birds, our gardens are becoming increasingly important habitats. I have been undertaking the Big Garden Birdwatch for many years, and it has provided me with opportunity to compare year on year the numbers of birds in my garden.

When we moved into this house in 1993 the garden was full of birds—many varieties of common garden species as well as some less common species. Then suddenly the number of birds reduced, and for three consecutive years (2000—2002) not one bird was recorded. Was this affecting my garden and the surrounding gardens only, or was this a problem within the greater areas. I did have my theories.

The **Big Garden Birdwatch 28th—29th January 2006** will give the opportunity for the **RSPB** to track any changes affecting our birdlife, and give early warning signs of problems.

Thankfully, since 2002 the number of birds may have slowly increased, but not to the previous levels.

Martin Chamberlain

CORYTON HOUSE



Coryton House was built in 1900 for **J. Herbert Cory (1857—1933)**, who was born in Padstow, Cornwall, but moved to Cardiff in the 1870's and became a major Cardiff Shipping Magnate, holding the ownership or directorship of over thirty five companies.

The land was originally part of the **Llwyn Mallt Farm**, and the surrounding land was to form **Coryton Garden Village**, a similar development to Rhiwbina. However, the First World War intervened, and the development never took place.

In 1913, J. Herbert Cory became **Sheriff of Glamorgan**, and in 1915 he became Conservative MP for Cardiff following the death in action of Lord Crichton-Stuart.

He was Knighted in 1919 and died in 1933, and was reported to have left an estate of over £0.5million.

Lady Cory continued to live at Coryton House for the next few years; however, she left for London, leaving the house empty for four years.

After the outbreak of the Second World War Coryton House was used as the Civil Defence Headquarters for the Cardiff Area, and after the war it was used by the GPO as its Welsh Headquarters. In 1952 the house and grounds were finally purchased by the GPO from Lady Cory. Recently BT have sold the land for housing to Belway Homes.

There is increasing pressure on historical building within the area, and the recent demolition of Whitchurch Police Station has led to changes in the character of the local area. Following a planning application to demolish three houses in Church Road and replace them with a 3-storey flat complex, a new organisation known as the **Whitchurch Heritage Group** has been formed. I wish them well in trying to protect the character of the area in the future, as so much has already been lost to development.

Martin Chamberlain

Phil Baker and his family were with us on the trip.
The following are his specialist notes on the day …

The variety of birds at the Centre is superb. Obviously there are Ducks, Geese and Swans from around the world, which can be readily seen as soon as you enter the building—panoramic windows in the restaurant area affording some excellent views of **Eider**, **Bufflehead** and **Ringed Teal**, just for starters.

As we went around on our guided tour, we passed many open pens with a whole variety of species. Later, we were able to browse around the grounds. Another good vantage point for the Centre's birds was the lake with its magnificent windowed hide, where feeding takes place from time to time; it gives excellent close-up views. That is only half the story, though, as the **"Millenium Park"** side of the Centre is where the wild estuary birds can be seen.

Barely had we left the building before we saw **Whitethroat** singing, and the first hide afforded wonderful views of the lagoons, the highlight for me being **Black-tailed Godwit**, which really glowed in the sunshine. We wandered through the reedbed, listening to the **Reed Warblers**, and came back via a tree-lined path where **Willow Warbler**, **Chiffchaff** and **Blackcap** were singing. We also saw **Kestrel** and **Buzzard** overhead. Altogether I counted 38 British species. I didn't count the number of non-British waterfowl!!

Although the birds were undoubtedly the main attraction, it was nice to see a **Brimstone** butterfly and **Speckled Woods** in abundance.

So I can report that a visit to the Centre can be highly recommended. There is also a lot here to keep children amused, such as the Swan Maze and a Water Mole City. Within the main building there is also an imaginative interactive interpretation area within a Discovery Centre. Here there are information videos playing, with discovery boxes and a giant microscope, together with many other interesting items to help children and adults learn about water and wetlands.

For next year's trip I hope to organise a visit to Brecon in the morning, and Rhayader to see the Red Kites being fed in the afternoon. Watch this space …..

Duncan Hockridge

LETTER FROM ANNETTE & DAVE LOCKWOOD

We love the Newsletter, and so enjoy reading it; we cannot keep up with what is about, as I am still unable to walk around the Reserve, which we used to do.

I wish I had thought to write at the time, but last year while driving around St Brides (looking for strawberry plants) in one of the Reens along the road, I saw a little Egret; and in the water up the side of the field, I saw another.

We often see Swans, Ducks and Moorhens, but that's the only time for Egrets. Our son lives in St Mellons, and runs around the area and sees Herons and Buzzards.

Thanks to everyone for all the hard work put into the Newsletter.

Red in Beak and Claw

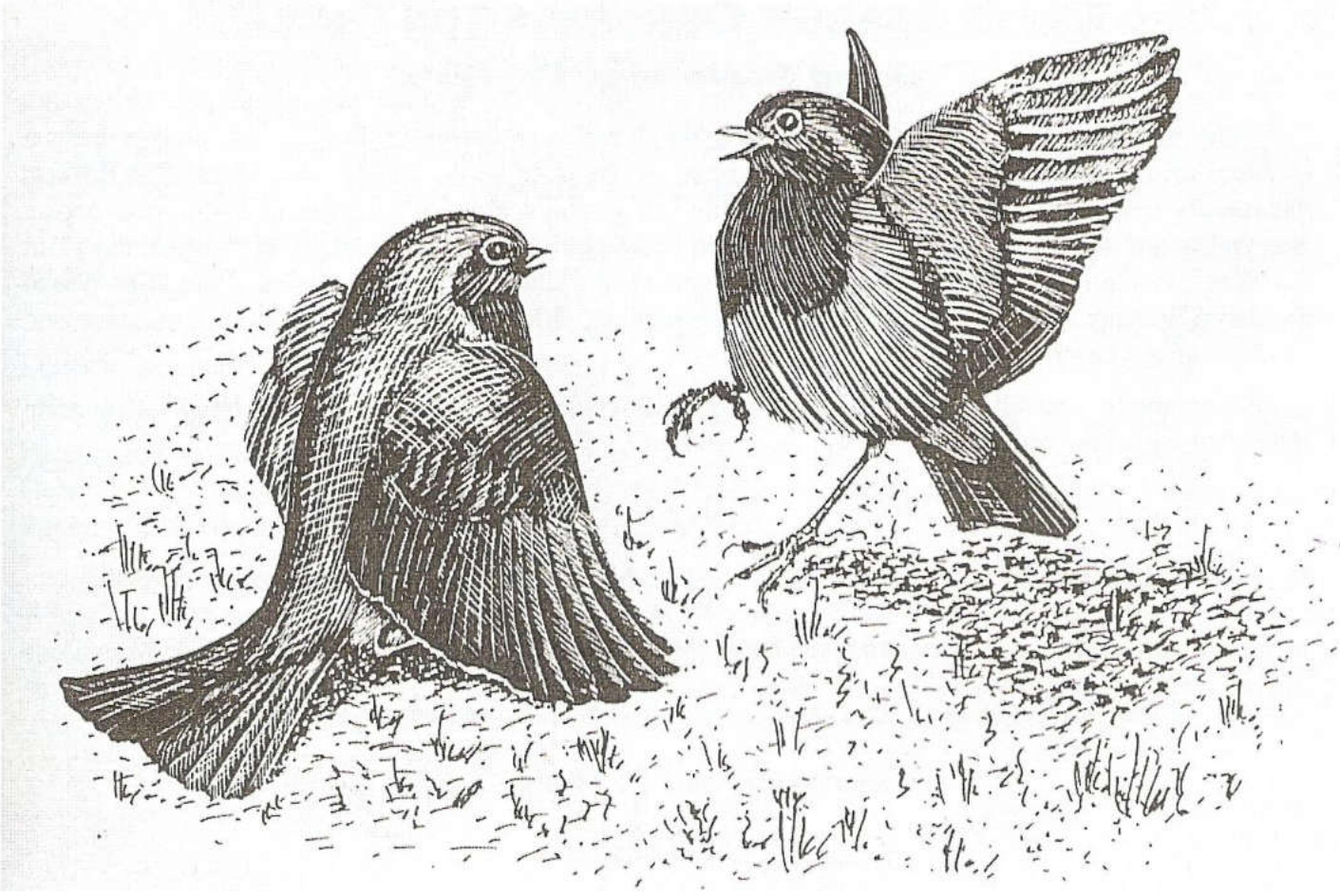
The cheerful image of a **Robin** perched on a spade handle is one of the staple Christmas Card images. His beady expression and bright red chest standing out against the snow seem the perfect expression of warmth in the depths of Winter.

In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Far from embodying the season of peace and goodwill, this bird has the temperament of a lager lout. The Robin is constantly spoiling for a fight, often so keen to scrap that it will take on anything—even inanimate objects.

The aggression stems from its extremely territorial nature. Each bird claims a patch of hedge or cluster of shrubs, and proclaims its ownership loudly in song, driving off all rival Robins. This territorial instinct is so strong that, unlike most birds, both males and females sing all year. Fortunately for us, this warbling melody is beautiful; Robins are closely related to the Nightingales. It also has a warning call —*"Tic-tic-tic"* — often the indication of a prowling cat or Sparrowhawk..

The red plumage acts as a warning display. Threatened, the bird will push its chest out to make it appear as large as possible. If this display and its song is not enough, the bird will resort to violence. At first this is little more than trying to frighten the intruder—usually another Robin that has strayed into its territory. But, as fighting develops, it turns nasty as the birds tumble to the ground while aiming for the eyes. Blinding, and even death, are not uncommon.

Although most Robins stick rigidly to their home patch, some do migrate as far as southern Spain, but these are replaced by migrants fleeing even colder weather in Scandinavia and Russia—which only leads to more territorial battles.



All this has little to do with the spirit of Christmas, but there is a link between Robins and the festive season. The breeding cycle begins around the Winter solstice by a female invading the territory of a male. If successful, the pair will build a nest of grass and moss in a sheltered site by March. The hen incubates the eggs, while the cock redoubles his song and becomes even more aggressive. After two weeks the eggs hatch and both parents work frantically to supply insects and worms that are vital for growth.

The young fledge after two weeks, and within three weeks will have dispersed. In a good year a pair can raise five broods, but life is hard for the youngsters.

It is significant that young Robins look much drabber than their parents. Toning down the natural warning signal on the chest reduces adult aggression, while the young learn to fend for themselves. It soon deepens, however, and as others see them as rivals they are initiated into the violent world of their parents.

Despite, or because of its aggression, the Robin is likely to remain one of our favourite birds. It feeds readily at bird tables and can become so tame that with patience it will feed from your hand.

The association with Christmas is comparatively recent, but Robins feature strongly in folklore. According to one myth, the colour comes from a bird that pulled the thorns from the head of Christ on the cross, staining its chest with blood. Another is that it scorched itself when it flew too close to the fires of Hell. For all the mythology, the name is surprisingly modern. To the Saxons, the Robin was *"ruddoc"* as in ruddy, but by Chaucer's day it was *"redbreast"*.

Redbreast was only dropped early in the last century. The name ***Robin*** was recognised officially as late as 1952.

Edgar Sapili

Monthly Friends / RSPB walk

Phil Baker

Our monthly walks continue to be well supported; we have had good weather every time the last three months!

August gave us excellent views of Kingfisher flying round and fishing from the second Hide. From the river bridge we were also able to observe the difference between House Martins feeding on the flies high up, while continually flying round, with the Grey Wagtail darting up from his rock to pick off individual flies low over the water. Other highlights were Raven flying over, and a good view of Reed Warbler, with a total of 31 species for the day.

September produced 28 species, plus an unidentified wader that flew upriver too fast for anyone to identify. We did get a good view of the Dipper, however, and House Martins were still present. A Treecreeper was another welcome sight.

Our October outing also netted 28 species, including the Dipper again, but best of all was probably the **Water Rail**, who appeared out of the reeds for us. A Sparrowhawk put in a brief appearance, and several Jays added colour to the day.



If you haven't tried it yet, why not join us and enjoy your local Nature Reserve? **We meet at 10 a.m. on the third Saturday of every month at the Warden's Hut**; everyone is welcome, young or old, beginner or expert.

Bird Feed at FOREST FARM

Winter draws near, and it is that time of year when we start feeding the birds. **Ted** has continued to sort out ordering the feed for us; in fact half has already been delivered. Last year we spent over £740 on feed, and I would like to thank all those who helped to make this possible with Bird Feed Donations totalling £410.50.

We have received some donations for this Winter's bird feed. Anyone else wishing to give a donation can send a cheque made payable to **Friends of Forest Farm**; write on the back ***"Bird Feed"***. This can be sent to the Treasurer or any other member of the Committee.

John Harding (Chairman)

MEMBERSHIP

Our current membership stands at **275 Families** plus **1 Group**—just 5 short of last year's figure.

Welcome to our new members, and many thanks for the continued support received from our long standing ones.

Noel Gale (Membership Secretary)

Meetings and Events

OUTDOOR EVENTS

Sunday 4th December 2005 **10 a.m.—12 noon** **Winter Birds of Forest Farm**
Led by **Mike Wiley** & **Chris James**

On the **third Saturday of each month10 a.m.—12.30 p.m.**
there is a combined **RSPB / Friends walk** to learn about and record birds throughout the year on the Reserve. Meet at **Forest Farm Warden Centre**.

INDOOR MEETINGS held in Whitchurch Community Centre, Tyn y Pwll Road, Whitchurch.

Wednesday 11th January 2006 7.30 p.m.
Wildlife within the Cardiff Area—illustrated talk given by **Mrs Linda Nottage**.

Wednesday 8th March 2006 **7.30 p.m.**
Conservation Aspects of Llandegfedd Reservoir, given by **Miss Rebecca Ward**.

Wednesday 12th April 2006 **7.30 p.m.**
Talk (to be announced) followed by a cup of tea—then the **A.G.M.**

Layout by **Robin Sotheby**

Published on behalf of **The Friends of Forest Farm and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve** by

Mr Ken Patterson, Flat 10 Heathwood Court, Heathwood Road, Heath, Cardiff CF14 4BT

Tel: 029—2019 8658

The Editor wishes to state that all views expressed by contributors are their own, as is the responsibility for them.